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2. — *Richard Wagner at Bayreuth. The Ring of the Nibelungs: A Description of its First Performance in August, 1876.* By JOHN R. G. HASSARD. New York; reprinted from the New York Tribune. 1877. 8vo. pp. 57.

THE letters here republished not only formed the best description of the Bayreuth Festival that appeared in the American press, but for the purposes of the general reader, and for the preservation of the really memorable features of the scene and the great trilogy itself, we have not met with anything so excellent among all the accounts that we have read elsewhere. It was not Mr. Hassard's purpose, from the very nature of his task, to write to the newspaper in which his well-known musical criticism has given ample evidence of his ability, a purely technical account of Wagner's masterpiece; but he has succeeded in doing a more widely useful thing, — in putting upon record in the most vivid way the impression made by it upon one whose knowledge made him a competent observer, while his experience made him a thorough interpreter of what his readers wished to know.

This useful republication of the letters is made at a most opportune time, when the attempt has been made to reproduce on the American stage some of the wonders of the Nibelungen Ring. Mr. Hassard's remarks on some of the features of the Bayreuth performance will serve to emphasize some conclusions to which the attendants on the American reproduction must have come, either wittingly or unwittingly. Apart from the music altogether, it has been the habit of many opponents of Wagner's theories to scoff at his insistence upon the thousand things which, in his belief, are necessary to "absolute fitness" in the production of his works. An attempt at the reproduction of these works without such assistance gives a clew to how much even this little part of his artistic perception may mean. The darkened theatre, the orchestra concealed in its "mystic gulf," the carefully secured absence of any approach to an incongruous effect, can do nothing toward making a work great; they may do much to prevent a work that is great from being marred. A certain fussiness, no doubt, attends Wagner's nervous care for all these things; but in the great end he is right, and we are too much given to the slighting of the smaller means.

It is not because Mr. Hassard's letters dwell upon this comparatively unimportant aspect of their theme, that we make this rather random observation; but we could not help seeing this feature among those which made the Bayreuth performance convey the impression of completeness which he so faithfully records. And this is one of the strongest

points of Mr. Hassard's description; one of those which make us glad that it has been put into this permanent, if still almost too modest, form. Better for preservation than any but the very greatest technical criticism, it will keep before our eyes all of the spectacle that words can well convey; and its record of the effect of Wagner's crowning work upon so well trained a student will make it always a valuable contribution to the history of music.

3. — *New Lands within the Arctic Circle. Narrative of the Discoveries of the Austrian Ship Tegetthoff in the years 1872 - 1874.* By JULIUS PAYER, one of the Commanders of the Expedition. With Maps and Illustrations by the Author. Translated from the German with the Author's approbation. New York: Appleton & Co. 1877. 4to. pp. 399.

THE Austrian Arctic expedition was productive of such important results, and is so full of dramatic incidents, that a narrative of it must, in any case, have been interesting. Commander Payer has, however, invested it with a literary charm which will secure for his book a large circle of general readers. His descriptions of intricate and dangerous navigation, of the hardships and perils of sledge travel, of the scenery of new and undiscovered lands, and of the exciting and hazardous escape of the officers and crew from the abandoned ship, combine to form a story of Arctic adventure that has not been surpassed. Polar exploration has heretofore been almost exclusively confined to the regions north of the American continent and the shores of Greenland. Since the celebrated journey of Sir Edward Parry, in 1829, no effort has been made to force a ship due north from the quarter attempted by the Austrian expedition, though it has been a favorite theory with Petermann and other geographers that the route by Smith's Sound is impracticable. This is now proved, by the recent British expedition under Sir George Nares, to be the case; but the experiences of Commander Payer and his brave companions only go to show that the difficulties are quite as insurmountable to the north of Novaya Zembya as they are to the north of Greenland, while the chimera of an open polar sea, which at one time found favor even with some geographers who should have known better, may now be considered to be exploded. Commander Payer, like Sir George Nares, is a profound disbeliever in the existence of any such *polynia* as that to which Dr. Hayes has so persistently clung, and devotes a chapter to the consideration of the subject. The chief value of this book, from a scientific point of view,